

**AMERICAN  
SLOUGHGRASS**  
*Beckmannia syzigachne*  
(Steud.) Fern.  
Plant symbol = BESY

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Kansas Plant  
Materials Center, Manhattan, Kansas



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**Alternate Names**  
Slough grass

**Uses**

Beal indicated in 1896 that *Beckmannia* was a forage grass of some prominence west of the Mississippi river. *Beckmannia* is palatable to all classes of livestock and is frequently hayed or grazed. American sloughgrass is an important component of Alaska wetlands and provides wildlife with shelter and food. The variety 'Egan' was selected and released for wetland restoration and erosion control in Alaska.

**Status**

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

**Description and Adaptation**

General: Grass Family (Poaceae). American sloughgrass is a cool season annual or short lived perennial grass that is commonly found in shallow marshes or sloughs. Its shallow root system supports

a leafy stem, which may be as tall as a meter. The branched inflorescence is classified as a closed panicle. The spikelets have very short pedicels and are arranged on only one side of the panicle. Spikelets disarticulate below the glumes and are one or two flowered. American sloughgrass is one of two species of *Beckmannia*; the other *Beckmannia eruciformis* occurs primarily in eastern Asia. American sloughgrass is adapted to conditions in the northern United States and southern Canada, Alaska and a portion of eastern Asia.

**Establishment**

Propagation of American sloughgrass via seed is the preferred method since there aren't any dormancy restrictions that inhibit rapid and uniform germination. The planting site should be prepared and tilled to discourage weeds during the establishment period. The best planting times in the Great Plains are late fall, to allow for fall establishment or a dormant seeding, which would promote early spring establishment. The free flowing spikelets present no difficulty for conventional planting equipment. Spikelets should be planted at a depth of 7 to 15 mm in the soil. There are 1,238,000 seeds of *Beckmannia* in a pound.

**Management**

*Beckmannia* is palatable forage for livestock and is frequently hayed or grazed. Forage nutritional data indicates that it is high in protein and nonstructural carbohydrates. *Beckmannia* grows wild in Alaska and the northern United States along wet meadows, marshes and swamps. It is not particular about soil type and tolerates acidic, neutral, basic and saline soil types. This species normally produces an abundance of seed, which will readily germinate upon reaching a suitable growing site. The use of *Beckmannia* on seasonally inundated sites where grain production is unpredictable may be feasible. Its vigorous growth habit is suited to sites where only temporary, yet productive cover is desired. Forage and seed yields under dryland conditions at Brookings, South Dakota were similar to long term averages for smooth brome grass (*Bromus inermis*) in the same area. The seed unit that falls from the inflorescence at maturity is a firm, free flowing spikelet that presents no difficulties for conventional harvesting and planting equipment.

**Pests and Potential Problems**

Stands of American sloughgrass tend to decline after 4 or 5 years due to competition when more

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aggressive grass species become established in the stands. Seed shatter prior to harvesting remains a moderate problem. Processing the seed once harvested can be challenging, because the *Beckmannia* seed is very small and special precautions are needed to ensure that small weed seeds are not included in the final product. The Alaska Plant Materials Center has found that when 'Egan' is grown on upland sites without irrigation plants will be stressed to the point of disease onset.

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### **Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

'Egan' American sloughgrass was released as a cultivar by the Alaska Plant Materials Center in Palmer, Alaska in 1986 for wetland reclamation. The original seed was collected in a road fill near Fairbanks, Alaska. The cultivar 'Egan' was named in honor of William A. Egan, the first and fourth Governor of the State of Alaska. Breeder and Foundation Class seed production will be maintained by the Alaska Plant Materials Center. Registered and Certified class seeds will be available from Alaska Seed Growers, Inc.

### **Control**

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA, NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective. The potential of *Beckmannia* becoming a weed problem in its area of adaptation is relatively slight.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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